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House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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CHINA: U.S. OBSTACLE TO SUPERPOWER STATUS

U.S. Representative Floyd D. Spence (R-SC), Chairman of the House National Security Committee, today welcomed the release of a report, "Selected Military Capabilities of the People's Republic of China," as the clearest official acknowledgment to date that China views the United States as the greatest obstacle to its ambition to become a great power and that China is developing the military capabilities needed to achieve its goal.

"Chinese leaders have said that we are the enemy and stand as the major roadblock checking their desire to dominate East Asia," said Spence. "This report, though couched in careful bureaucratic language, admits as much. It also reveals that the Chinese understand the need to create forces to offset the military advantages that the United States now enjoys. By early in the next century – about the time when the size of the Chinese economy is projected to surpass our own – China will have developed large and capable military forces."

The unclassified version of the report, approved by Defense Secretary William Cohen on April 2, stated, "China's long-term goal is to become one of the world's great powers. Its leaders envision that, at some point during the first half of the twenty-first century, China will be securely established as the leading...political power in East Asia."

According to Spence, "China has learned from the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War that any challenge to America requires patience and strength over the long run. The strategic problems posed by an emerging and well armed China may test us more than the Soviet Union ever did."

The report concludes that "as an emerging great power, China will probably build its military power to the point where it can engage and defeat any potential enemy within the region with its conventional forces and can deter any global strategic threat to China's national security." According to the Defense Department report, China's efforts will include developments in seven areas of military capability: advanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities; highly accurate and stealthy ballistic and cruise missiles; enhanced command

and control networks; unmanned aerial vehicles; increased abilities for precision targeting and strikes; the growing ability to deny the sea control that is the key to the U.S. Navy's military presence in East Asia; and the gradual development of rapid-deployment forces capable of following up strikes.

In particular, the report noted that "China has a large, well-established infrastructure for the development and production of ballistic missiles," and "has received technology related to missile program from Russia in recent years." The report concludes that China will have the industrial capacity "to produce as many as a thousand new [ballistic] missiles within the next decade" and is developing additional land-attack cruise missiles as a "high priority" for "theater warfighting and strategic attack."

Spence expressed particular concern over the emphasis placed by the Chinese on the rapid development of missile technology. "A missile fleet of this size could overwhelm any theater missile defense capability planned for this vital region and fundamentally alter regional calculations of the balance of power," said Spence. "Coupled with improved targeting and command and control networks, it is clear the Chinese are working to develop the ability not only to saturate the air defenses of Taiwan or other nations, but the fleet air defenses of the U.S. Navy. If we wish to preserve our role in East Asia and ensure the region's security, the United States and our allies had better start taking the missile theater more seriously."

The report was conducted by the Department of Defense as directed by the Fiscal Year 1997 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 104-201) under a provision authored by Spence (Section 130S).

Members of the press interested in obtaining copies of the unclassified version of the report may call the National Security Committee press office, 202-225-2539. All other inquiries should be directed to the committee policy office, 202-225-4151.

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